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ABSTRACT

An experience-based career education (EBCE) program integrates academic learning, career experiences, and life skill development through direct learning experiences in the community. EBCE enables each student to gain individual attention, both with a teacher and with community members. This increase in individual attention does not mean that EBCE has to cost more than a conventional classroom program. The increase in individual attention can be gained through the assistance of community volunteers, and many programs operate at the same cost as the conventional alternative in the same community. In determining the cost of an EBCE program, the administrator should consider the following factors: (1) staffing--the lower the student load per staff member, the more the program will cost; staff must follow students; and part-time programs may cost more than full-time, complete model programs; (2) space need not be a significant cost factor; (3) existing forms of transportation should be used as much as possible; (4) insurance should be obtained to protect both the student and the resource site; (5) telephones, reference materials, and copying are necessary expenses, but they still need to be regulated; and (6) though an EBCE program can operate without extra cost, there usually are some start-up costs, and they vary widely among sites. EBEC programs stand more chance of surviving and benefiting students if the per-student cost is in line with regular programs, if broad-based support is promoted, and if expansion plans are made in the beginning. Long-term planning is best for a successful EBCE program. (KC)

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RESEARCH BRIEF

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COST CONSIDERATIONS FOR EXPERIENCE-BASED LEARNING: IMPLEMENTING EBCE

If EBCE is Right for Your Community, What Do You Need to Know and Do to Plan an Affordable Program?

The cost of Experience-Based Career Education (EBCE) has been a lively topic ever since Sidney Marland, in 1971, introduced the concept that school learning could take place at employer sites. During the EBCE Feasibility Study, cost-studies were sponsored by both the National Institute of Education and the U. S. Office of Education. Additionally, each of the participating regional laboratories commissioned at least one study that was related to the potential cost of the experimental EBCE model it was designing. By 1973, when the experimental programs began to be stabilized, and actually became prototypes that could be documented, evaluated and compared, the cost issue was a major concern--not only the careful documentation of actual expenses, but the projection of the cost of replicating the prototype programs in other locations. Both recording the actual expenses and projecting costs, were laden with difficulties. For example, the seemingly simple task of documenting the actual expenditures for staff salaries of Learning Coordinators was complicated by the different methods used for costing employee benefits at each of the host school systems. Much more complicated, however, was the problem that records of expense were of little value to a school administrator who was considering the adoption of the EBCE concept, and of adapting it to the local conditions found in a specific community.

The cost-information needs of the school administrator are related to the fact that the school is an economic unit, wherein expense is merely a record of the reduction of resources, and in most school systems there are never enough resources to go around. The school decision-maker is also faced with the fact that most of the available resources are not in the form of discretionary funds; rather, the resources are in the form of staff members--staff members who already have assigned responsibilities. To decide to replan the use of certain staff or of certain funds, the school administrator must be prepared to make judgments about the relative value of alternative approaches. In some cases, the value comparison will be monetary, but in many cases the value judgment will be on impact--"Is it worth it, in comparison with what we are now doing?"

The importance of the cost considerations to EBCE programs was underscored at the first annual meeting of the National EBCE Association in 1977 and it has been "smoldering" ever since. During 1982, it erupted anew when the Association's program featured three presentations on cost issues. Subsequent to that meeting, the Association's Board of Directors and staff of Far West Laboratory began a joint effort, leading to the publication of this report. It is hoped that the ideas presented will help practitioners and decision-makers understand the economic factors in program planning.

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WHAT IS EXPERIENCE-BASED CAREER EDUCATION?

An Experience-Based Career Education program integrates academic learning, career experiences, and life skill development through direct learning experiences in the community. EBCE is for students who are ready to test "book learning" against the "real world;" have only vague notions of what happens outside the classroom; want to test tentative career interests; or who want to gain specific information and preparation for an identified career area. Students acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to choose, enter, advance, and find satisfaction in adult roles. Individually planned learning programs utilize large and small businesses, governmental agencies, community institutions, and individual professionals and entrepreneurs.

EBCE may not be for every student, but we have not yet found a type of student for whom it can not work. Both young women and men have benefitted, as have youth from all ethnic backgrounds, economic levels, and special needs.

EBCE may not be for every community, but again we have not found a type of community where it could not work. Urban, suburban, or rural; rich or poor; large or small--they all can benefit.

EBCE is adaptable. It can be installed as a separate learning center or as a program within a regular school. It can be full-time or part-time, open to the entire student community or only to select groups. The program can focus on career education, or it can be integrated within the academic system. EBCE can even function with a single staff member.

I'M INTERESTED, BUT WHAT WILL EBCE COST?

EBCE enables each student to gain individual attention, both with a teacher and with community members. This increase in individual attention does not mean that EBCE has to cost more than a conventional classroom program, however. The increase in individual attention can be gained through the assistance of community volunteers, and many programs operate at the same cost as the conventional alternative that is available to students in the same community. There may also be opportunities for significant savings through the use of community resources. In determining the cost of an EBCE program you should consider the following factors:

Staffing

The lower the student load per staff member, the more the program will cost. Staff functions include coordination of student learning, recruitment of community resources and program direction. The size of your program will determine the number of personnel you need. If it is a small program, the director may also serve as a learning coordinator, responsible for developing, maintaining, and evaluating the learning programs of students, or as a resource analyst, recruiting and analyzing persons and organizations in the community. In a larger program, direction may be a full-time job. A larger program also may have a basic skills specialist to coordinate individually designed activities in reading, writing, and mathematics. Clerical assistance, also necessary, is sometimes obtained by hiring a student part-time.

Staff must follow students. The staff-student ratio in EBCE programs varies widely, but many carry student loads equivalent to the district norm--a first requirement for operating without additional cost. An EBCE program should not require additional staff hirings, rather staff should be recruited from within, and should not result in new hirings elsewhere. In other words, staffing must follow the shift in student load created by an EBCE program through a reallocation of personnel resources, so new hirings are unnecessary.

The organizational arrangement of staff and students must be considered. While most teachers have one class period with each of several groups of students each day, the EBCE learning coordinator is responsible for the same group of students for their entire involvement in the program. For example, in a full-time program serving 150 students, one teacher might be drawn from each of six departments, providing a diversity of backgrounds in the EBCE staff, but each teacher would be responsible for the same 25 students all

day. This is an important factor in planning the reallocation of personnel to implement the "staff must follow students" guideline.

Part-time programs may cost more than full-time, complete model programs. Part-time programs have students who are enrolled in regular classes for a part of the school day and engaged in EBCE activities for the remainder of the day--sometimes extending into the after school hours. These programs often add to a school's staffing costs at a rate approximately equivalent to the cost of students' attendance in the other classes. Although the students are part-time, the staff work load may be closer to full time, what with employer-site development and monitoring, assisting and monitoring EBCE students' planning, and field-site and reporting activities. In a part-time program, therefore, the "staff must follow students" guideline is inappropriate.

Some EBCE programs gain supplementary funding and are able to support one or more new staff members. However, if additional costs for staff are incurred, plan to phase into the "mainstream" of the staff as soon as possible. Remember, any arrangement that results in new staff will also result in EBCE becoming identified as an extra-cost program and, thus, is not in the best interest of long-term survival after the supplementary funding ceases.

Facility

Space need not be a significant cost factor. Because students spend much of their time in the community, they do not require large amounts of space in school. Although a separate facility might have the advantage of being located near the business district, there is little question but that the space requirement for an EBCE program can be met in the existing facility. Whether located in a school or separate facility, the program should have an EBCE center where students can plan community activities and assess their experiences. All that is really needed are offices for the staff to use for confidential meetings with students, resources, or parents; meeting areas for group activities; study space; a telephone; and storage space for equipment and records. A single classroom can be adapted to serve the needs of 40 or 50 students. Where you decide to locate the program is more a decision based on what facilities you have available, how adaptive you wish to be, and how you assess the relative advantages of being completely separate from the regular school or an integral factor.

Transportation

Utilize existing forms of travel as much as possible. In communities where public transportation is good, transportation is scarcely a problem. In some places special arrangements can be made to use school buses during the "off" hours. At other sites, students and staff cars or vans have served. Remember that one of EBCE's objectives is to help youth develop adult job-related competencies, and getting to the work-site on time is ultimately an individual responsibility. In any event, selecting resource sites within a close geographical area reduces the travel problems and the time lost commuting.

Insurance

Protect both the student and the resource site. The two main considerations when looking into insurance are to protect the student in case of injury and to minimize the employer/experience-site's liability. Four basic kinds of insurance are needed: general liability, accident insurance, transportation insurance, and personal-injury protection. This kind of coverage should not incur any great additional expense. In the first place, as part of the school's instructional program, EBCE is eligible for existing school district coverage. Check with district administrators and legal counselors to determine if the coverage is adequate. Sometimes an inexpensive rider on existing school district insurance may be advised. Most community sites will already have insurance policies that cover accidents on the premises. You also might advise students to enroll in supplemental health coverage available at minimal cost to them, and usually already in effect for students traveling in groups to other schools (e.g., athletic teams, band, orchestra, service clubs).

Miscellaneous

Telephones, reference materials, xeroxing are necessary expenses, but they still need to be regulated. Telephone costs, for example, can be controlled. But be careful, for even though the cost is dependent upon the number of instruments installed, do not have too few. Students, staff, and resources must be able to call in and out without major delays. At least one telephone line and instrument for every 25 to 30 students is essential.

Every EBCE program needs to be able to print or photocopy student planning forms, monitoring instruments, evaluation forms, resource information forms, and other materials; there may be as many as 15,000 impressions per 100 students. Probably some funds normally allocated for instructional materials should be reallocated for this purpose.

Although students must have access to reference materials, you should avoid purchasing what is easily available to them in the community. A copy machine should be available to them, but located so that a staff member can oversee its use. Finally, in controlling non-personnel costs, do not underestimate the value of asking the students to help solve problems.

Start-Up Costs

Though an EBCE program can operate without extra cost, there usually are some start-up costs and our experience in existing sites indicates wide variation. Some EBCE programs have been initiated without additional expense. However, teachers who will staff the program usually need a month or more prior to program start-up for pre-operations training and program preparation. You may need to purchase or create materials.

The basic program manuals developed by the EBCE laboratories are for sale; they are also part of the public domain and may be copied. There may also be a cost related to recruiting businesses and other organizations in the community and preparing them for program participation.

WHAT IF MY COMMUNITY'S PROGRAM NEEDS REQUIRE MORE MONEY THAN THE DISTRICT CAN ALLOCATE?

Although we are emphasizing the fact that EBCE can operate within most school's budgets, there may still be a need to supplement available funds, especially to cover start-up costs. Many private foundations assist community-based learning programs. A directory such as The Foundation Directory, compiled by the Foundation Center in New York, will help you select sources likely to have an interest in experience-based learning programs. Contact community-based organizations and the chamber of commerce to learn of local companies that actively work with and support community-based education programs.

As a nationally validated program listed in the Education Department's National Diffusion Network (NDN) catalog, Educational Programs That Work, EBCE has often been among exemplary programs designated as eligible for state-administered adoption grants. Contact your state facilitator and your state career education office for information about support that may be available. In addition, the National Experience-Based Career Education Association, which currently operates an NDN-funded dissemination project, can inform you of specific services it can provide.

HOW CAN I INCREASE THE PROBABILITY OF SURVIVAL OF EBCE?

Even though your immediate concern is in implementing an EBCE program, this is also the time for planning for the future. To improve the chances that the program will be around 10-15 years from now, think ahead now to plan how you will keep your program operating without supplementary funding. There are several things you can do:

- Keep the per-student cost down so that it does not appear out of line with the

average per-student cost in the regular program. Remember that the cost per student decreases as the number of students increases. Therefore a good recruitment policy is essential.

- Even though you may be starting a relatively small program, plan for expansion. Include potential future staff members in your planning and your pre-operations training, so you will have knowledgeable people to draw on as your program expands.

- The broader the base of your support the better your chances of survival. Programs that have carefully gained the support of principals, faculty, the school board, parents, and the community-at-large can claim a larger constituency, making them harder to attack and discredit. Consider such things as an advisory board that includes school administrators, school board members, students, parents, and community representatives; a periodic newsletter; and periodic luncheons for resource people and others.

- Consider carefully several strategies for providing EBCE students with any supplementary instruction in basic skills that they might require outside their project activities. Regular high school classes, special workshops taught by the high school English or math teachers, and tutorials are three strategies proved viable and cost-efficient. Tutors can include students who are enrolled in teacher educator programs and who need practical experience, students eligible for work-study grants, or volunteers from community-service organizations. Peer tutors can also be used.

- Monitor student attendance (ensure that learning coordinators contact parents to verify excused absences, spot-check records) so that maximum credit is given for average daily attendance. Such monitoring can help detect and correct attendance problems and thus raise the base-revenue per student.

- Be alert to any slippage in enrollment and fill openings as soon as possible. The per-student cost is usually budgeted on a full-quota enrollment plan, so any reduction adversely affects it--which is why initially you ought to select more students than your desired student enrollment.

- Talk to EBCE programs already in existence. You may well benefit from their experience. Learn what they might do differently were they to start over again. The National EBCE Association, a network of EBCE practitioners, offers a variety of services to members, including a Directory of EBCE programs to help you take advantage of the experiences of others. A Directory of EBCE Programs is free to members of The National EBCE Association, or may be purchased.

- Wherever possible you should develop a working relationship with district business office personnel so you can learn their system, become part of the approval process on all expenditures of EBCE funds, and earn a reputation as a cost-conscious and "tough" budget manager. By these steps, you can do much to ensure the continuation of the program.

BEYOND COST ISSUES: QUALITY OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

As with any economic enterprise, management decisions in schools are seldom easy to make. Most require long-term economic considerations, well beyond the specific cost issues covered in this report. They require a careful estimate of the impact on the long-range plans of the enterprise--in this case, the school or school system--to be certain that decisions will lead to results that are compatible with long-term goals, and the strategic plans to attain the goals. Unfortunately, such thoughtful planning does not always take place in schools or in business--often because of the immediacy of the pressure for near-term results. Experience-Based Career Edu-

cation is not a program for the near-term; rather, it is a program that will enable the schools to make long-term strategic gains. Not unlike some American industries in recent years, schools have shown a decline in the number of students and in their share of the educational marketplace, amid frequent complaints alleging a decline in the quality of schooling. Therefore, for both business and school organizations, the quality issue leads to forecasts of further loss of competitive position, unless major changes are made.

It is not enough for schools to develop more and better job task training. Employers are able, willing, and already providing such training at a cost that may even exceed the total cost of public education. They say that they want employees who can profit from that training, and have the motivation, understanding and habits of conduct that enable them to become mature, productive contributors to the strength and economic health of the employer organization; thus, adult workers and managers are already stakeholders in the efforts to improve schooling. Experience-Based Career Education provides an instructional model for engaging with these stakeholders to create learning environments for excellence in education, in similar ways that successful businesses create better working environments for improved productivity. The model is already being implemented in many states, is validated and documented, and has an active network of practitioners who have formed the National EBCE Association. In addition to publishing a Directory of EBCE sites, the Association provides technical assistance through its Dissemination Project, under the National Diffusion Network.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The material in this RESEARCH BRIEF was drawn from a variety of sources, and involves the work of many persons over the decade in which Experience-Based Career Education was conceptualized, designed, evaluated and disseminated. It is not possible to give recognition to an individual as author, and even to attempt to give recognition to the many persons who contributed to it would quite likely result in omissions. Some of the content is traceable to responses to the questions raised ten years ago during the EBCE Feasibility Studies. Some content is derived from notes taker during a NIE-sponsored study of cost-related issues begun in 1973 under the leadership of Tom Israel, NIE program monitor during the initial development of the four models, during which he convened the first conference on EBCE Cost Considerations. Also of use were two reports, published in early 1974, that were based upon that work: "Design, Assessment, and Recommendations for Reporting Education Program Research and Development Costs and for Estimating Service Delivery Costs of Program Adoptors," authored by Charles H. Cline and published by ARIES Corporation, and "A Cost-Comparison Study on EBCE Replication," by George Rusteika.

In 1976, Ronald Bucknam, became NIE program monitor for the EBCE dissemination and knowledge-building activities, and he gave inspiration and advice to another cost study conducted by Far West Laboratory. A major event in that study was a conference sponsored by the Laboratory in conjunction with the National Experience-Based Career Education Association (NEBCEA) in Chicago in 1979, at which Alan Robinson, University of Illinois, and Nona Janssen, Illinois State Department of Education, assembled the leaders of several EBCE sites in the states of Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana and Montana to describe the cost-considerations encountered while starting-up and operating their programs.

One outcome of that meeting was a request for a publication on cost considerations that could be given to potential adopters. In an effort to respond, George Rusteika and Kendra Bonnett, both of Far West Laboratory, drafted a brochure on cost considerations for installing and operating EBCE; however, in submitting it for field-review found that it had a major shortcoming in that the changes in the availability of federal funding made obsolete a major section of the draft. Additionally, the reviewers were sharply divided on the question of whether it would be feasible to operate EBCE without additional funding.

The 1982 NEBCEA conference featured three presentations on cost: "Cost Effective Approaches to Implementing In-School EBCE Models," Quentin Weidner, Iowa; "EBCE on a Shoestring," Bruce Cubbin, Michigan; and "Improved Academic Connections Need Not Cost More," George Rusteika, who also submitted another draft of the brochure for the Association's Board of Directors to review. They recommended that it should be published, and asked Andrew Seager, an experienced-based education consultant in Maine, and Ted Kildegaard, Director of NEBCEA's NDN-funded Dissemination Project, to work with Far West Laboratory toward the completion of the document. As the publication took form, a decision was made to change from the brochure format to the RESEARCH BRIEF format, thus placing it more visibly in the context of the Laboratory's other Education, Work and Productivity materials. Throughout this lengthy process, Ron Bucknam continued his helpful comments and support.

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ADDITIONAL RESEARCH BRIEFS

Additional Research Briefs on topics related to education, work, and productivity are available from Far West Laboratory:

- Developing Good Workers
  by Robert M. Peterson
- Employment Practices Affecting Entry-Level Workers
  by Karen Chatham
- Teaching About Work In The Social Studies
  by James N. Johnson
- Getting A Job--What Skills Are Needed?
  by Carol Murphy and Lynn Jenks

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